

# CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR THE GERMAN LANGUAGE CLASS IN THE DOUBLE-DEGREE PROGRAMME BUSINESS ENGINEERING

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## Abstract

*This paper aims to give an overview on how German is taught as a foreign language to students enrolled in the Bachelor of Business Engineering, a double-degree programme offered in Universiti Malaysia Pahang. The double-degree students have the opportunity to complete their first two years of study in Malaysia and their last two years in Germany. Taking the TestDaF examination is compulsory for double-degree students. Hence, the German Language curriculum has been meticulously planned to ensure the students would be competent in the language. As such, the settings of the language class are discussed thoroughly in this paper. Additionally, it also discusses the challenges faced in teaching German as foreign language. This paper ends with some suggestions for improvement.*

**Keywords:** German as a Foreign Language, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Curriculum Design, Double-Degree Programme, Business Engineering

2017 JHLCB

## Introduction

In the context of internationalisation of German Universities, the double-degree programmes (DDP) are becoming an effective instrument for the exchange of students, lecturers and staff and at the same time serve as a medium to promote Germany as a top study and research destination (Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz, 2013). Through the DDP, students outside Germany get the opportunity to be attached to a German university and are exposed to new teaching culture as well as problem solving approaches. This exchange also

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encourages knowledge transfer that is not only confined to teaching and exchange of the latest scientific literatures between partner universities but also the exchange of research ideas and the initiation of joint research projects (Borgwardt, 2012, p. 9).

In order to take advantage of these benefits, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) currently offers three DDPs. The first DDP, *Bachelor of Mechatronics Engineering*, was introduced in the year 2010 through the collaboration between the *Faculty of Manufacturing Engineering* and Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences, Germany. In 2012, the *Faculty of Mechanical Engineering* introduced UMP's second DDP, *Bachelor of Automotive Engineering*, which is also another collaboration with the Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences. In 2015, the third DDP, *Bachelor of Business Engineering* which emerged from the cooperation between the *Faculty of Industrial Management* and ESB Business School of Reutlingen University, Germany, was introduced. Since the introduction of these DPPs, all partnerships have been facilitated by *German Academic Career Centre (GACC)* at UMP.

### **Background of the Faculty of Industrial Management**

The *Faculty of Industrial Management* or FIM started as the Department of Technology Management in 2008 and underwent several restructuring and rebranding to be known as FIM in 2014. FIM is one of the non-engineering faculties in UMP where its mission is to provide enriching teaching and learning experience through creative convergence of business and technology. Currently, FIM is offering three undergraduate programmes, namely *Bachelor of Industrial Technology Management*, *Bachelor of Project Management* and the latest addition in 2015, *Bachelor of Business Engineering*. Besides undergraduate programmes, FIM also offers MBA programme, three Master by Research programmes: *Master of Technology Management (Operation Management)*, *Master of Technology Management (Project Management)*, *Master of Technology Management (Human Capital Resources)* and *PhD in Technology Management*.

FIM's latest bachelor degree programme, *Business Engineering* is DDP that places a strong emphasis on the unique combination between Business and Engineering knowledge, allowing graduates to gain competitive edge in technically oriented business positions, especially in the area of logistics, supply chain and production. One of the challenges faced by the Malaysian logistics industry is the shortages of expertise in the design of supply chain network, integrated warehouse management and information technology application as majority of graduates do not see career opportunities in the logistics industry (Economic Planning Unit, 2015). Therefore, the need for skilled human capital in the Malaysian logistics industry further justifies the relevancy of the *Business Engineering* programme and also to support the continuous growth of the Malaysian logistics industry.

The UMP-Reutlingen University collaboration started with an initial discussion in 2012. In February 2013, both parties signed the Memorandum of Understanding and eventually, the Cooperation Agreement was officially signed in 2015. The decision to choose ESB Business School as a partner was reached as a result of FIM's goal to work with the best and be one of the best. According to a study conducted by The World Bank, Germany scored 4.12 in 2014, which was the highest score in *Logistics Performance Indicator* amongst 160 countries (Arvis, J.-F. et al., 2014) while ESB Business School's programme *Business Administration* and *Operations Management* was ranked first in 2014 among similarly related programmes

by *Wirtschaftswoche* (Hochschule Reutlingen, n.d.). In September 2015, FIM successfully launched UMP's third DDP, *Bachelor of Business Engineering* with the intake of 27 students.

### **Description of the Concept Business Engineering**

The term *Business Engineering* (BE) is still uncommon in Malaysia as the inclusion of the word *engineering* in the term leads potential students to stereotype the programme as another pure engineering programme. The UMP BE however, is part of Industrial Engineering, an interdisciplinary programme that combines Business and Engineering knowledge with an in-depth specialization in logistics and supply chain management. This unique DDP is the first of its kind in Malaysia. The curriculum of this programme has been jointly developed by FIM and ESB Business School. The core of the programme structure was adopted from the model used by ESB Business School in its programme, *International Operations and Logistics Management*. Through countless revisions and refining process, the finalized BE programme is able to retain the originality and quality of the German model while at the same time realistically blends in with the local elements that are fitting for a Malaysian bachelor's degree programme.

The BE programme allows UMP students to earn two degrees in four years, where students will complete their first and second year of study in UMP and then continue their third and fourth year of study in Reutlingen University. Similarly, students from Reutlingen University can also complete their first and second year of study at their home university and then, opt to complete their last two years in UMP. Upon fulfilling all academic requirements, students from UMP and Reutlingen University will be awarded the *Bachelor of Business Engineering with Honours* (from UMP) and the *Bachelor of Science in International Operations and Logistics Management* (from Reutlingen University).

In order to assure the quality of the programme, a joint Board of Examination meeting is held twice a year (at the end of every semester) by FIM and ESB Business School to discuss the students' performance, the nomination of transfer students and the *Flying Faculty* for the subsequent semesters and continuous quality improvement initiatives. One of the highlights of this programme is the idea of the *Flying Faculty* in which every semester, at least one subject will be taught by a faculty member from ESB Business School. The *Flying Faculty* provides students with a glimpse of how German lecturers conduct their lectures. The assimilation of the *Flying Faculty* in the programme is also beneficial to FIM through knowledge transfers, especially in the sharing and introduction of advanced software. Besides that, the *Flying Faculty* also promotes sharing of ideas and expertise between faculty members of the two institutions.

Although the programme is still new, the response from potential students is rather encouraging. There are a few selling points of the programme: first, it is a bachelor's degree programme that combines business and engineering knowledge; secondly, the double-degree programme has dual certifications; and finally, the opportunity for Malaysian students to study in Germany for two years during the third and fourth year, and likewise for German students, in Malaysia. During the two years of study in ESB Business School, the Malaysian students will be exposed to the German culture and also a different form of teaching, thus enabling the Malaysian students to develop their ability to adapt to an entirely different

culture and new academic environment. The six-month internship in Germany will also help the Malaysian students to gain industry-specific skills, increase their employment and marketability prospects, in addition to the development of professional network. Given the BE graduates' value-added advantage of having learnt the German language, their experience of living in Germany and exposure to the German culture, these graduates will also be more attractive to the German companies in the job market and also to the Malaysian-based German companies.

### **German Class in the *Business Engineering* Programme**

In UMP, German as a foreign language is offered as an elective course that emphasises only on mastering the language for everyday communication. However, for the BE students, they need to acquire a certain level of language proficiency in German, similar to the one of a native speaker. Therefore, the language syllabus has to be designed differently for this purpose, unlike that of the regular elective course. This is to ensure that the students would achieve the required level of German language proficiency, especially in terms of professional communication in all four skills, namely, reading, listening, writing and speaking. Furthermore, the design of syllabus needs to be aligned with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001). The language competency will then be verified by the TestDaF Examination. Before they can start their two-year study in Reutlingen University, the BE students would first need to sit for the TestDaF examination and will only be awarded both degrees if they pass this examination with a minimum of 14 points.

### **TestDaF Examination Requirement**

The TestDaF is one of the German language examinations for foreign students who wish to study in Germany. The examination consists of four sub-tests: Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking. The grades are marked in term of three levels, namely, *TestDaF-Niveaustufe* (TDN) 3, TDN 4 and TDN 5 (TestDaF-Institut, 2010). In order to achieve the required minimum 14 points, the BE students need to achieve at least level TDN 3 in two of the sub-tests and at least level TDN 4 in the other two sub-tests. According to the CEFR standards, TDN 14 would be equivalent to level B2/C1 (Independent User/ Proficient User). In order to achieve this level of proficiency, the BE students need to complete between 700 and 1000 weekly student contact hours (WSCH) (Goethe Institut, 2017).

With regard to the BE students, in terms of the German language proficiency, a pass in the TestDaF with 14 points would mean that they can understand a complex text with all its details in their field of study and also in the general sense of the complex and specialized scientific texts not related to their subject of interests. Furthermore, it also means that the learners can recognize implicit information in these texts and solve tasks related to the texts (Fazlić-Walter, K. & Wegner, W., 2014, p.9, 17, and 29). Moreover, learners can follow professional discourses, lectures and media features on everyday and specialized topics. Additionally, they can also immediately recognize the main factual information, summarize it in oral and written forms (Fazlić-Walter, K. & Wegner, W., 2014, p.45, 51, and 59). The examinees can produce an extended coherent text based on the given information in the form of non-linear texts such as graphs, statistical tables or guiding questions within a limited time (Fazlić-Walter, K. & Wegner, W., 2014, p.70). The examinees can also engage in communication with German native speakers on topics related to their areas of interest and

everyday situations with no difficulties. They also are able to depict the state of affairs on various topics, to verbalize information from a graph, to weight the advantages and the disadvantages, to compare the alternatives and to develop hypotheses based on the given information (Fazlić-Walter, K. & Wegner, W., 2014, p.86). Thus, the curriculum of the German Language class for the BE students was developed to meet these requirements.

### **Language Competencies in German Language Courses**

The BE students are required to enrol in four different levels of German Courses (*German 1*, *German 2*, *German 3* and *German 4*) that stretch over two years with 140 WSCH per semester for each level. The focus of *German 1* is on developing the elementary skills in reading, listening, writing and speaking. After completing this course, the students should be able to read short dialogues, postcards or emails. By then, the students would already have acquired enough vocabulary to enable them to understand, formulate and use simple everyday expressions and phrases. The students would then be capable of introducing themselves in oral and written communication, talking and writing about their hobbies, describing their current living situation, family and friends, using simple sentences, answering yes/no questions and questions with the question word (e.g. wann, was, welche, wie) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR, 2001).

*German 2* corresponds to the CEFR level A2 and the beginning of CEFR B1. At the end of this course, through reading, the students can understand the general message of a text, translate most of the German words into their native language and find the specific information in the text. The type of texts emphasised in this level are advertisements, prospects, menus, schedules, movie reviews, e-mails, and informal letters (CEFR, 2001). The focus in the listening comprehension is directed towards the auditory recognition of expressions and sentences in the fields of personal information, shopping, employment and immediate environment. In terms of writing skills, it is expected that students can describe their daily routines through e-mails, short letters and postcards. In regard to the students' speaking skills, they will be able to express themselves in simple sentences on topics and tasks such as their immediate environment, family, work, future plans, giving instructions, describing the sequence of actions and to reproduce a text in simple sentences partly using their own words.

The students pass *German 3*, if while reading the text for the first time they can immediately grasp the general message and answer the close-ended and some factual questions. During the second reading, students are expected to be able to translate most of the German words in the text without the aid of a dictionary and at the same time answer all open-ended questions. The same is applicable for the listening comprehension. The students pass this course if they understand the general information and are able to answer the factual questions without referring to the dictionary during the first listening attempt. After the second listening, it is expected that students can deduce the meaning of the words without the help of a dictionary, answer the open-ended questions and summarize the content of the text. The common types of text in this level are long simplified non-fictional texts or short excerpts from a novel (CEFR, 2001). Meanwhile, the students' proficiency in writing skills will enable them to produce reports discussing their impressions or experiences on certain events, described in a chronological manner. Their reports need to exhibit clear formal

structure, with the tendency to use complex forms of grammar and diversified vocabulary, although not always necessarily correct. Finally, the students' proficiency in speaking skills will enable them to repeat utterances mostly in their own words at a slow pace, the information communicated by another person or orally summarize a written text in a coherent manner on topics such as education, work, personal life, environment or technology. In short, the students will be able to do a short presentation, answer questions and involve in discussions related to a given topic. At the end of this course, the students should be able to master everyday conversations with native speakers without problems.

Lastly, in *German 4*, the students will be working with texts such as scientific reviews, reports on culture, science, society, travel logs, essays, and political commentaries. At the end of this course, in terms of reading skills, it is expected that the students can understand the general content of the text, answer all factual questions as well as the open-ended questions. Monolingual dictionary will be used for this purpose. With regard to listening comprehension, the students will be able to understand conversation between native speakers given that the conversations are in natural pace and in standard German. The students will be able to follow and understand an extended talk, report or lecture on a specialized topic without the need to translate it and able to produce a short written or oral summary on the topic discussed (CEFR, 2001). For the writing skills, the students need to describe graphs, complex sequences of events, develop hypothesis, and give advice in their own words. They would also be able to produce complex coherent texts, which are aligned with TestDaF requirements on specialized topics such as the ones related to technology, research and society. These texts should show a variety of complex and simple sentences, grammatical structures and diversified vocabulary, which the students should be able to produce with little help from the dictionary or none at all. In terms of the speaking skills, the students will need to take part in discussions on specialized topics, with the addition of weighing the arguments for and against the topics and to be able to give a presentation on a specialized topic.

The 560 WSCH completed after two years during German 1 through German 4 courses are not enough to achieve the required level proficiency in German for BE students. Hence, the additional supervised online courses (*OC A*, *OC B* and *OC C*) are offered during the semester holidays (after semester 1, semester 2 and semester 3).

### **German Language Courses in Semester Break**

The *Online Courses* (OC) are offered to ensure that the students are still in touch with the German language during the semester holidays. The main purpose of these OC is to bridge the gap between the semesters with self-study and to develop the self-regulated learning behaviour among the students. There are three phases of OC, namely, *OC A*, *OC B* and *OC C*.

*OC A* is a follow-up online course for *German 1* and serves as an introduction to *German 2*. *OC A* lasts for four weeks, from the middle of January until middle of February. Similarly, *OC B* takes place after *German 2* but lasts for eight weeks, from the beginning of July until the beginning of September. In *OC B* the students will revise the materials from *German 2* and receive a solid introduction to *German 3*. The main aims of *OC B* are to enrich the students' vocabulary, to enhance their grammar and to develop their reading comprehension skills. Meanwhile, *OC C* concentrates on strengthening the skills, which were acquired

during *German 3*. The main emphasis in this course is placed on writing, reading and vocabulary enhancement. This course stretches over four weeks from the middle of January until the middle of February. The role of the lecturers during the OC would be confined to consultation and supervision. Discussions between students and lecturers are conducted on daily basis through various online platforms such as the UMP's own online learning platform KALAM, other online applications such as *Google* and *Edmodo* and social media applications such as *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*.

### **Challenges in the *Business Engineering* Programme**

With new opportunities come new challenges. The BE programme is without exception. Firstly, the major challenge would be to achieve the required level of the German language competencies. As mentioned earlier, the students will only be awarded double-degree if they pass TestDaF with a minimum of 14 points. To achieve this, the students need to undergo at least 700 to 1000 of WSCH in their German courses, as stipulated by the CEFR (2001) in order to be proficient at either B2 or C1 level. Throughout *German 1* to *German 4*, the students will only acquire 560 WSCH. The additional three OC offered during semester holidays will increase the total WSCH from 560 to 840. Although in theory this may seem appropriate and would be adequate to achieve the B2 level, based on the experience with the other two double-degree programmes in UMP, a total of 840 WSCH would still be inadequate to ensure that the students would stand a chance to gain the required minimum 14 points in TestDaF.

Secondly, the learning environment also poses a challenge to the students who have very limited opportunities to be exposed to the German language outside of their formal classes as the students are overloaded with other subjects due to the heavy-nature of the BE curriculum. Outside of their formal classes, the German language will be diluted by the Malay and English speaking environment. In addition, the number of WSCH are also being reduced significantly, due to number of public holidays and the students' compulsory involvement in the extracurricular activities organized by the university.

Thirdly, some students perceive German as an unbridgeable obstacle from the start while some students consider the German class secondary, compared to other courses. These attitudes significantly influence the students' performance in the class and present additional challenges to the lecturers and programme coordinators.

Finally, another challenge is the lack of hours to introduce the *Technical German* and *Academic Writing in German* as a fixed part of the German Language curriculum. Because the lectures and seminars at the ESB Business School are also partly conducted in English, the B2 level of proficiency in German should suffice to facilitate the transition from predominately English- into German-speaking environment. The students might experience the difficulties eventually in the later semesters, during their internship and while writing their bachelor thesis, as a significantly higher level of German language proficiency than B2 and a particular linguistic sensitivity is required to be able independently elaborate a scientific topic in a form of a Bachelor thesis and to be an active contributor in the real work environment. Neglecting and marginalising this segment of the curriculum could lead to two

consequences: firstly, unsatisfactory results in the TestDaF exam, and secondly, hindrance to active class participation at the German university during the final two years of study.

Additionally, there are also other constraints that may not be directly linked to the teaching and learning of German as a foreign language. For example, the tuition fees have also emerged as an indirect challenge for the language class and a direct one to the BE programme. The main reason is that the students are not fully focused on learning the new language as they spend too much time seeking for funding opportunities. Although the tuition fees are comparatively lower than the cost of completing four years of study in Germany, the tuition fees would still be deemed higher compared to other bachelor's degree programmes offered by Malaysian public universities. Since the commencement of the programme in September 2015, FIM and the GACC have been working closely to secure sponsorship and scholarship from numerous state foundations, government agencies as well as companies in the private sector. As the BE programme is still new in Malaysia, many are still unfamiliar and unaware of it. This leads to difficulties in attracting funding from potential sponsors for the BE students.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Extensive marketing efforts need to be carried out by FIM to increase the level of awareness on BE. The initiative of conducting talks and road shows in matriculation colleges around Malaysia has proven to be effective and will be carried out continuously especially during the university-application period. A brief introductory discussion on BE can also be conducted with the career guidance counsellors at matriculation colleges as students would normally seek advice on programme selection and career path from them.

Another target group of the marketing activities are German companies in Malaysia. Establishing direct contact with the industry through information-sharing sessions about the potential of BE, extending invitation to the industry experts for knowledge-sharing sessions and industry visits to selected companies help to create opportunities for students' internship placements and job prospects upon graduation. This promotional work needs to be extended to non-German companies based in Malaysia and companies outside Malaysia as well.

From the viewpoint of the German language teachers, the number of students in the class has to be reduced. Traditionally, the average number of students in a language class at UMP is 25 which has the inclination to be gravitating towards 30. In order to secure the optimal student-teacher relation, the number should be reduced between 10 and 15 students per class. Through the smaller number of students, the ratio of the student-talking-time in the class and student-lecturer time (i.e., the time spent by the lecturer on correction and consultation) will be increased. This will have a positive long-term effect on the students' performance.

As the nature of BE curriculum is rather heavy (a total of 135 credit hours), students tend to lose concentration and motivation towards their German classes as they are overloaded with quizzes, tests and projects in other subjects. Some students opt to skip their German classes to focus on other subjects. Hence, in order to increase the students' interest towards the German language, the language class can be conducted through various outdoor learning activities, such as study trips to other universities for knowledge-sharing sessions, movie



evenings, theatrical performances, sketches or language camps. However, in order to implement such settings during the semester, two important aspects must be considered: firstly, the university has to allocate an appropriate budget to fund such activities, and secondly, such activities have to be accounted as learning units.

Another suggestion that is worth considering is offering additional German language classes at the German partner university when the students are in Germany for their third and fourth year of study to ensure the sustainability of the German language learning process. In doing so, the transition to the German educational system and the integration into the German society in Germany will be alleviated as the students would have the opportunities to improve their language skills, through which their overall academic performance in their final two years in Germany will hopefully be enhanced.

## Conclusion

Currently, it may seem like the UMP BE programme poses several challenges especially from the perspective of the students' German language competencies. However, with a thoroughly worked out plan for improvement of the language curriculum through experiential learning and benchmarking of the BE German language curriculum with that of other DD programmes, the BE programme is likely to flourish further. Indeed, the UMP BE programme offers greater employability prospects and added values, not only because it affords students with the opportunities to broaden their horizon through learning experiences in two different countries but also its double degree graduates to compete and outdo their single degree competitors in the long run.

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